



# Summer reading program inspires elementary students

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Laboratory employee Maryrose Montalvo asks a good question: “How can we expect to be a nation that leads the world in education when only one third of our fourth graders are proficient in reading?”

But rather than just raising the issue, she set out to do something about it, and enlisting the help of her family and esteemed New Mexico author Rudolfo Anaya, she created a summer reading program to inspire and encourage Northern New Mexico children to read more.

The success of the program led to recognition from the state legislature and ultimately the Governor. Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham permanently designated October 30 “Rudolfo Anaya I Love to Read Day” in New Mexico at a May 7 ceremony, promoting literacy awareness and honoring Anaya’s contributions to literature.

Elementary students in grades K–6 from Los Alamos, Pojoaque, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe and Bernalillo counties (including tribal schools and home-schooled children) take part in the Rudolfo Anaya Summer Reading Program. They keep a record of books read over the summer, and all students receive recognition for participating.

There are additional prizes for the students who read the most books, and the program partners with libraries to set up interactive reading activities over the summer. The Laboratory’s Community Partnerships Office has supported the program since its inception.

## Personal motivation

As well as appreciating the importance of literacy as a key foundational skill, Montalvo has a personal reason for starting the program. “One of our children, Christopher Montalvo, loved to read and greatly admired author Rudolfo Anaya’s work,” she explains.

After tragically losing Christopher at a young age, Maryrose and her family created the summer reading program in his memory in 2016.

Anaya supports the program by providing books as prizes for the readers, and one of his recent children’s books, *Owl in a Straw Hat*, works particularly well as part of the program, teaching the folklore and traditions of New Mexico cultures in an accessible way. (*Owl in a Straw Hat II* will be released in June.)

"His books resonate wonderfully with children while they practice reading skills," says Montalvo. "Mr. Anaya continues to write, teach, and inspire us, and the program has been blessed to have him as a benefactor and mentor."

## Unanimous support

With support from State Senator Pete Campos, who represents Mr. Anaya's home county of Guadalupe, Representative Patricia Caballero-Roybal from Bernalillo, and Representative Joseph Sanchez from Montalvo's Rio Arriba district, a bill designating the state's newest holiday passed both the Senate and the House unanimously, before coming to the governor to be signed into law. (Sanchez is also a Lab employee.)

Montalvo finishes with another question: "We hear a lot about STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), but how can you teach engineering to a student who's having a hard time with reading?"

"We believe it all starts with reading and are very proud to be able to help improve literacy in New Mexico through this program."

*The 2019 Rudolfo Anaya Summer Reading Program runs from May 23 through August 16. For more information, go to [anayareaders.org](http://anayareaders.org)*

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